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ABSTRACT

Several issues related to the licensure of industrial/organizational (I/O) psychologists are considered. Initially, the status quo of psychological licensing is reviewed. Reasons for favoring and opposing licensure are examined in terms of the protection of the public and protection of the field. Generic, specialty, and combined generic and specialty approaches to licensing are detailed. Several recommendations are presented including: (1) assessing the need for licensure; (2) identifying I/O psychology users, as well as identifying inadequate service providers; (3) developing rigorous competence assessment procedures; (4) educating members about licensure issues; (5) providing data to support positions; (6) assuring representation on American Psychological Association boards and committees; and (7) taking a proactive, constructive role in the profession. (RC)

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Licensure of Professional Psychologists: Unsettled Controversies

While the question of licensure of industrial/organizational psychologists may not have much sex appeal, it is an issue capable of arousing more basic emotions. More basic than sex? Well, take hostility, for example, the white hot kind. This seemingly banal topic, licensure, can get Division 14 members very agitated, especially if the right nerves of the right (wrong?) parties are tapped.

I/O psychology and licensure are like a couple who are unsure whether they are right for one another, but whose parents and friends keep quietly and persistently urging back for another look. Many I/O psychologists say "we've looked and we don't like," yet the membership body is not of one mind. In some states, like Michigan, the would-be bride has gotten restless and gone on to other suitors, leaving industrial/organizational psychologists unlicensed, and, at the moment, unlicensable.

In the past (say ten years or so) Division 14 leadership has felt neglected by APA when models and methods of licensure or certification were put forth. It was "mad as hell and not going to take it anymore" (Bartlett, 1979), which got it the attentive eyes of an APA leadership intent on preserving a fragile alliance. Now that APA is apparently willing to listen to Division 14 for its views on how and whether licensure should affect it, the question is: does the Division have anything to say? If nothing else, the new attention has forced the Division to confront some basic questions about licensure, such as: are we for it or agin' it?; how, if at all, can licensure best serve the needs of Division 14's public?; is the government the proper credentialling agency? And so forth, into a thicket of bramble as prickly as any Peter Rabbit might have stumbled upon. It is easy to understand the plea of those who shout: laissez faire!; leave us be.

Division 14 members may be missing some high drama, however. This story has controversy, conflict, character, a plot that won't quit, and enough theoretical intrigue to keep psychologists busy for years. And, it's one of the longest running shows in town. What do industrial/organizational psychologists really do? (You may have noticed the title of this symposium.) Who is an I/O psychologist? Who is not? What threats does I/O's work have for the public? Who indeed is the relevant "public"? How do we assess competency in this field? What, if anything, should the field do when its members practice or behave unethically? What mechanisms are needed to assure that adequate review procedures are available for allegations of wrong doing by licensees? What are the consequences of not licensing, particularly if all other applied psychologists are doing so?

All of these questions must be answered before a strong case for or against licensure can be made. Yet, if any group of psychologists is well equipped to address questions like these, it certainly ought to be the members of Division 14, who have been examining such questions for decades on behalf of organizational clients. "Physician heal thyself" may be just admonishment to shoemakers whose children are without shoes and to industrial psychologists who do not describe, measure, and evaluate the work behavior of their own kind.

The paper I am presenting today is designed to alert Division 14 members to some of the issues involved in professional licensure or certification. It can only very briefly touch the surface of a monumentally complex area. Ann Howard and I have developed a more lengthy report based on our work as members of Division 14's Professional Affairs Committee this year presently under review by Division 14's Executive Committee.

Today it is not clear that a professional psychologist can afford not to be aware of issues of licensure and credentialing.

One other note. My discussion will mention from time to time the results of a rather lengthy telephone interview poll we conducted with members of Division 14 who were selected to be representative of the types of professionals who belong to the Division, including persons who are licensed and not, and those with both small and large amounts of experience in the field. I do not want to unduly emphasize the results of this poll, since the sample was not scientifically selected, and consisted of only about 40 persons. However, this work does provide useful information about the possible consensus of the membership.

Status Quo

At the moment, there is considerable disagreement within APA about which psychological specialties should be licensed and which not. To summarize a very tortured history, a revision of a set of 1967 guidelines for licensure of psychologists was prepared by the Committee on State Legislation (COSL) in 1979, The 1979 revisions introduced numerous changes in the existing 1967 guidelines. Many of the 1967 provisions had been offensive to I/O psychologists, among others. Recommended changes included loosening the definition of what programs consituted training in "psychology," allowing more time for interstate practice without having to become licensed in other states, and removing the exemption from licensing of psychologists in public and industrial organizations. Because these compromises were unacceptable to many proponents of licensing, the 1979 guidelines were not accepted by APA, and the 1967 ones still apply. Many I/O psychologists are not satisfied with this situation.

As for licensure procedures, most states presently use a generic model of licensing or certification, a few have specialty licensure, and some have no laws, since theirs were lost to sunsetting legislation. Most states requiring licensure or certification use the national examination in psychology (abbreviated EPPP), a multiple choice test currently undergoing validation work, and most have a post-doctoral supervised experience requirement of at least one year. States with specialty licensure, or generic and specialty, typically use additional assessment devices such as a written or oral examination in the area of specialization. Even states using only generic licensure typically proscribe psychologists from practicing outside of their area. Most states review at least EPPP scores, training credentials, supervisory endorsements, and ethical complaints (if any) to determine eligibility for licensure. There are also presently ethics committees in most of the states to address charges of unethical conduct by psychologists, and they may recommend to the state boards that licensure or certification be revoked. National ethical committees, such as those of APA, may communicate ethical complaints filed with them to the state boards of psychology.

The first question to be considered in licensure is not the adequacy of the existing procedures, but whether to license or certify at all.

Reasons For and Against Licensure

A variety of reasons have been offerred, equally vociferously, by those favoring and opposing licensure. These include:

1.) Protection of the public. Advocates say that the public needs assurance that those who are grossly incompetent are excluded from practice, and ideally, that persons who provide services to clients are qualified to do so. Detractors maintain that such protection might be

desirable, but in practice it usually does not happen. They feel that it is mainly the profession, or rather, presently licensed professionals, who are protected by licensure rather than clients, and that competition and creativity are stifled (Danish & Smyer, 1981). Advocates counter that if we do not have licensure while other professions practicing in the same area do, we will attract all the marginally trained who need a convenient roosting place. The recent case of Florida is illustrative (Foltz, 1979), in which the licensure law was abandoned and scores of untrained persons began offering their services as "psychologists". There are also many examples which could be cited of persons with little or no training who claim to be industrial psychologists.

For I/O, an important issue is whether or not there is indeed a public threat for which protection is needed. Since I/O psychologists do not deal directly with the public, one argument runs, they should not have to be licensed. Such an argument overlooks some facts. First, many, though by no means all, I/O types do deal with the public in face-to-face assessments, counseling, or consultation. Secondly, those who argue that organizations, unlike individuals, are sophisticated enough to judge competence themselves ignore that many organizations are <u>not</u> sufficiently informed to make competence judgments. Indeed, the numbers of fads in such areas of practice as organizational development suggest that many organizations are far from being intelligent consumers of psychological services. Moreover, recent developments in such subspecialties as personnel selection suggest that there will be few organizational representatives who can keep track of the complexities of practice in the area, unless they are themselves professionally trained. Lastly, there is the argument to be made that industrial/organizational psychologists do deal with the public, but indirectly.

Its public includes those job candidates who are accepted or rejected on the basis of psychological tests or other assessment devices over which they have no control, informed consent, or competence to evaluate their adequacy. Do not, this argument maintains, these people have the need to be protected from malpractice by industrial psychologists, real or self-described?

2.) Protection of the Field. This position argues that whatever other role licensure may play, it is desirable because it helps the field to define roles and norms of its practitioners, and a professional identity, by excluding persons who are not appropriately prepared, and by reinforcing those who are. Even acknowledging that some professional groups perform similar or identical functions as do licensed psycholcgists, the former groups' not being able to use the title may help to assure that good and bad practitioners are not indiscriminately lumped together. Many in our telephone sample countered that were they not licensed they could go right on performing the same activities, but cali themselves management consultants. Others argue that enhancement of the identity of a field is no reason to employ an unwieldy apparatus like licensure, or to invoke the government. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents in our sample were clearly strongly identified as psychologists and did not want to relinquish that identity.

3.) Other Reasons For and Against. Some (one or two of our sample) oppose licensure altogether, considering it an inappropriate function of government, and basically, immoral (Locke et al., 1980). Other people

oppose licensure on grounds that it is too costly and too much trouble. Still others are most concerned about the unintended consequences of licensure (Danish & Smyer, 1981), such as restricting the allowed models of practice, or limiting the number of practitioners in the field. There is some evidence that the latter indeed can happen (e.g., Shimberg, Esser, & Kruger, 1973). Another reason favoring licensure in some states is the confidentiality protection which safeguards information provided by a client to a licensed psychologist. An issue of larger relevance to many in our telephone sample was that licensure enhanced their credibility when testifying in court cases, especially personnel selection cases.

Licensing is but one approach to these issues, and here I will briefly summarize some of the options for professional credentialing.

Varieties of Licensure

First, licensure (or certification) comes in different forms, and they are far from equal. These include generic, the present approach in most states, specialty, or combined generic and specialty. Generic is favored by APA as the model of choice for several reasons including the fact that it helps keep the field from becoming more fractionated than it already is, and, perhaps the ultimate criterion, it may be more feasible to have one licensing board per state than to try to develop a whole series of them for each area of specialization. I might note that members of Division 14, at least those we contacted, seemed markedly uninformed of the costs of getting licensing laws passed, enacted, and implemented on a year to year basis.

On the other hand, most of our sample favored specialty licensure, seemingly motivated by the fact that they were apprehensive about an examining procedure that attempted to cover all of psychology (e.g., the EPPP

exam). Arguments against specialty licensure include the fact that it probably costs too much, APA is adamantly against it, and it is very unclear just what would constitute appropriate definitions of specialties. For example, in I/O alone there are at least four areas of specialization: personnel, organizational development, machine design and human factors, and consumer psychology. Should applicants have detailed knowledge in each of these areas? And what happens as the subspecialties become specializations in their own rights? Will we then need licensing boards in each of these areas? Designers of credentialling methods need to look beyond their own immediate realities and needs to create systems that are sound for future generations of psychologists.

Combined generic and specialty licensure requires demonstration of expertise in the general field of psychology and in the area of specialization, though methods for qualifying in the specialty differ from state to state. A variation of this approach is statutory licensing at the generic level, with non-statutory credentialling in the specialization, the latter occurring through a mechanism like ABPP.

Two other statutory methods have been suggested. These are: removal of all existing licensure laws, with replacement by a public disclosure policy requiring practitioners to disclose their credentials to clients. The disclosure takes the form of a publicly available document, filed with some governing agency, which must accurately reflect one's training and experience. Lastly, some advocate licensure or certification of practices rather than professions, so that personnel selection, for example, might be a regulated area regardless of who performs it, while the field of I/O psychology was not itself regulated.

There are also non-statutory alternatives to licensure, which remove the government from the picture, but which do not eliminate the problems

of assessing competence, monitoring ethical and malpractice complaints, or assuring that professionals remain updated in their training. One such approach is the assessment and certification of competence by a professional body. This was the approach used prior to 1800, when professionals were pretty much left alone to manage themselves. Interestingly, that era ended with a period of strict licensure (Gross, 1978). Self regulation by professionals maintains that if fields are really as complex as licensing advocates maintain, then only other professionals can validly make judgments on their competence anyway, so why involve the government? What this view may ignore, however, is the tendency for professions to be protective of their own members, and the fact that few such approaches actively involve consumers of the profession's services in their credentialling procedures (unlike licensing boards, which now typically do).

Finally, there are some people who prefer the caveat emptor model: let clients judge competence for themselves and use the civil court system to address issues of malpractice and fraud.

Recommendations

Are you beginning to see the bramble thicket I promised? When I add that I have grossly oversimplified the issues involved in each area to meet the time restrictions of this presentation, I am sure you can agree that the complexity is not trivial. Developing a satisfying, not an optimizing, solution feasible in today's political context is probably the best that can be hoped for. One thing is certain, though: I/O will be passed by if it ignores these issues, and will be the passive victim of other group's efforts to satisfy their own needs. This has already happened in Michigan.

Before I summarize what the Professional Affairs Committee concluded after a year's analysis of the history and present realities of psychology

licensure, let me first say that regardless of whether licensing or certification is the route Division 14 works toward, the issue of professional credentialling will not go away on its own. Indeed, many would argue that I/O should be at the forefront of defining and working toward adequate assessment of professional competence as a basis for advocacy of licensure policies. They are the ones best trained to do such work.

Very briefly, our committee recommended the following to Division 14's Executive Committee:

1. First, thoroughly assess the need for licensure. Identify which practices in the I/O area constitute a threat to the public. The job analysis work begun by Neal Schmitt and Erich Prien attempting to define the work roles of the profession is a good starting place. Assessment could be done in several different ways: 1) Polling the membership; 2) (Our preference) a research study designed to assess the threats to the public; 3) Let the Executive Committee of Division 14 decide for the membership.

2. Identify the users of the services of I/O psychology. Assess empirically, rather than on the basis of strong opinions, the actual threats out there, and especially note the needs and opinions of the consumers of I/O practice, not just the providers. A few years ago I did a study of the perceptions and experiences of the consumers of organizational deveopment services; I had very little literature to review.

3. Identify potential providers of bad services to the public in the domains of I/O psychology. These might include not just "management consultants" and the like, but also other psychologists poorly or not at all trained in I/O. How can their effects be minimized by the credentialling actions of I/O?

4. Assure that rigorous competence assessment procedures are developed for those activities which the previous steps demonstrate need to be licensed (certified, credentialed, or whatever). These could be developed by states, APA, Division 14, or others but the aim should be to forcefully measure competence in the selected areas, and not just to go through the motions.

5. Educate the membership of Division 14 about these issues and get consensus about a plan of action before proceeding to APA and the states. Don't base judgments about the membership's views on the beliefs of a few strong-voiced members. Poll the membership systematically to find out what it thinks, educate them as to the messy realities of this area, and interact with other divisions from a constructive, yet united, stance.

6. Back up the Division's positions with hard data. There is no shortage of opinions on licensure in or out of the Division, but there is considerable shortage of data other than vignettes of personal experiences generally framed to support personal points of view. Make the effort (and it is not trivial) to develop genuinely informed opinions.

7. Assure that true representatives of the Division serve on APA boards and committees. This will help see that the Division's viewpoint is well represented by articulate spokespeople who will adequately put forth the membership's point of view (not just their own).

8. Take a proactive role in the profession and approach the rest of APA in a constructive manner. Such an approach will enhance the possibility that the Division's views will be seriously considered and implemented.

None of the members of the Professional Affairs Committee end this year's work with the idea that licensing is a popular topic or that its complexities will soon and forever be resolved. Most of us believe, however,

that there is much constructive work yet to be done by Division 14 in licensure. The assurance of competent performance by the membership, and the protection of this field from inappropirate intruders, deserve it.

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